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ABSTRACT

Suggesting that teaching the literature of the Vietnam War can enliven literature study in the middle and secondary school classroom, this paper explains why this literature can have such a powerful impact on students, and how teaching it fosters students' responses to literature. The paper begins with a discussion of why students should study and why teachers should teach the literature of the Vietnam War. The paper next discusses the four main types of literature that have emerged in response to the Vietnam War: the combat narrative; literature that focuses on the war at home; novels that deal with the refugee experience; and works that focus on the legacies of the Vietnam War. The paper then discusses the "why, what, and how" of teaching Vietnam literature, focusing on specific assignments and works of literature in each of the four main types of Vietnam War literature. The paper also examines students' responses to such literature and discusses what these responses reveal. An appendix presents a 36-item annotated bibliography of Vietnam War literature, classroom activities, and writing assignments. Contains 48 references. (RS)

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Winning Hearts and Minds with the Literature of the Vietnam War

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for
National Council of Teachers of English Convention:

Mini-Workshop:
Vietnam War Literature in the Classroom and Curriculum

San Diego, California

November 17, 1995

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I am going to attempt to answer a few important questions this afternoon: First, why should our students study and why should we teach the literature of the Vietnam War? Second, what literature should we teach? And, finally, how might we go about teaching some of this literature? Furthermore, I am going to address the why, what, and how of teaching primarily in terms of middle and secondary classrooms. Finally, in order to explain the why, what, and how and prove my contention that the literature of the Vietnam War can have a significant impact on students, I am going to start by examining student responses to the literature of the Vietnam War; I want to show you how students typically respond to some Vietnam War literature, and talk a little bit about what these responses reveal. After examining student responses to Vietnam War literature, I'm going to discuss some literature that you might want to try teaching in your own classes. Also, I'm going to show you some teaching strategies for some of this literature, and, I am going to ask you to do one or two of these activities so that I can show you the dynamics of how they work in the classroom. Finally, along the way, I'm going to try to explain why this literature can have such a powerful impact on students, and how teaching it fosters students' responses to literature.

Why Study the Literature of the Vietnam War?

There are a number of reasons why our students should study the war and the literature that has come out of the war. Let me start with one very important reason. As a number of writers and historians have indicated, the Vietnam War seems never to end, and, if we are going to move forward as a nation, we need to find a way to move beyond this war. For example, writing in the shadow of President Clinton's decision to officially recognize the Hanoi government, David Shribman of *The Boston Globe* writes that the Vietnam War "just doesn't end." He notes that, "It doesn't end because there remain more than 2,000 American's missing. It doesn't end because the war opened up some issues that haven't been resolved: issues such as the legitimacy of authority, the responsibility of citizenship. It doesn't end because there still isn't a consensus about a war that was prosecuted by one class, fought by the sons of another and avoided by some who were, at that very moment, using college education, America's classic ladder of social mobility, to move between the classes." And, he notes that "Even today it is imposible to construct a rationale for American involvement in Vietnam that will not rub the old wounds raw."

Shribman concludes that "America--great and powerful, with plenty of friends, the world's sympathies and even a conscience--continues to struggle with a war that has been over for two decades but is with us still." He says that "...of all the lessons of the war, the one that stands out may be this: Wars aren't always discrete events with beginnings and ends. They can't always be confined to a simple chapter in history." In fact, as historian Allan Goodman argues "... the historical problem students need to consider above

all is how long the aftermath of the Vietnam War will continue to shape their lives and society" (1990, A36).

Why Teach the Literature of the Vietnam War?

Why teach the literature of the Vietnam War? In the preface to his book, *Teaching Hearts and Minds: College Students Reflect on the Vietnam War in Literature* (Carbondale: SIU Press, 1992), Barry Kroll states that his book was shaped in part by his desire "... to demonstrate some of the possibilities of undergraduate education, exploring what can happen when students are engaged by a topic and encouraged to inquire into it. Thus there is a strand in the book that is frankly celebratory: I want to tell readers how exciting this course was for both teacher and students" (ix). In other words, what Kroll discovered in teaching a course on the literature of the Vietnam War is that this topic, this literature, engages students and the teacher. In addition, through what happened to him and and his students in this course, Kroll comes to realize "the possibilities of undergraduate education," or, stated another way, he comes to understand what teaching and learning are really all about. Put as pure and simply as I can, we should teach the Vietam War because it is exciting, and it is exciting, in part because students are interested in it. In addition, if we encourage engagement and encourage students to inquiry into this topic they are interested in, then the results will be far beyond our expectations.

Student Response to the Literature of the Vietnam War

Just as Kroll (1992) discovered in teaching his course, many teachers who have taught the literature of the Vietnam War report that student response always goes beyond their expectations (Carter, 1989 & 1991; Endress, 1984; Johannessen, 1992,1993, & 1995; Kroll, 1992; Mandel 1988; and Oldham, 1986). Let me just give you a few examples of how some of my students have responded to this literature, and talk a little about what these responses reveal. I'd like to show you some excerpts from student written responses after studying different works that deal with the Vietnam War.

The first student response is to Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977). It is an excerpt from a longer analytical essay:

> Michael Herr writes that "A few extreme cases felt that the experience had been a glorious one, while most of us felt that it had been merely wonderful. I think that Vietnam was what we had instead of happy childhoods." This sounds strange at first. You hear all of these stories about how bad it was and how everyone wanted to come home, yet he says it was a wonderful experience. But when I thought about it, it started to make more sense. The best way I can explain it is by using an example. When I go to Great America, I love to go on the roller coasters. The bigger they are, the better I like them. But when I get on, I actually get terrified. The whole ride is scary. But when it is over, I say it was wonderful. I want to go back on. I think Vietnam might have been like that for many people, probably 100 times more thrilling. Once you were in the war, you were more terrified than you thought possible, and all you can think about is leaving. But, once you leave the war, you realize that there is nothing else like in the world, and you say it was wonderful. That's

> what Vietnam was--the most exciting and terrifying roller coaster ride you'll ever experience.

Notice the student's insight into Herr's comment about the war, and notice how he was able to relate it to his own experience. This is one of the most exciting things about teaching this literature. To many students this literature seems to speak to them in ways that no other literature can.

The responses is to Mark Baker's oral history, *Nam* (1981). It is from a student response paper.

> We are supposed to learn from history, and before I read this book, I had read a lot about the history of the war because I wanted to understand my dad who is a Vietnam veteran. But, I really didn't learn very much from the history books I read that was helpful. It wasn't until I read this book that I really began to understand what Vietnam must have been like for him, and it really helped me understand why he is the way he is and why he reacts to certain things the way he does. That's why I think anybody who studies the history of the war should read this book.

Notice how this student had studied the war in history, which is a rarity itself, but that reading this particular work gave her insights into what the war was like for the soldiers who fought in Vietnam.

The next response is an excerpt from composition students wrote in respone to the documentary film, *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam* (1986).

> After viewing the film, the questions that went through my head were "Why do we go to war and is it worth it?" One soldier was asked, "Do you think that it is worth it?" And his reply was, "They say we are fighting for something but I don't know." After seeing how the soldiers suffered from day-to-day, wondering when they will go home or even if they will still be alive the next day, doesn't put a doubt in my mind and I don't think that it is worth it.

Notice that this student realizes that the war, any war, is simply a waste, and in coming to realize that war is a waste, this student speaks to a concern I have heard expressed again and again by colleagues: "Why do we want to be reminded about that terrible war?" they tell me. Well, this student's answer points toward what N. Bradley Christie argues is the most important reason to study the literature of the Vietnam War. He argues that "Teaching about the Vietnam War is not a matter of wanting to recall all the pain; it is a matter of needing to remember, of reaching through our pain to have students see themselves and their world more clearly" (1989, 37).

The next response is to Bobbie Ann Mason's novel *In Country* (1989). It is an excerpt from a longer composition students wrote in response to the novel, and in it the student discusses the ending of the novel.

> But there is hope at the end of the novel. This comes about by the reconciliation that comes to Sam, Emmett, and the nation. Sam comes to realize her searching is related to the fact that part of herself died with her father, and she comes to accept that she cannot really know the whole truth about her father, what he was like and how he died. Emmett finds reconciliation when he studies his buddies' names

> on the wall. "He sits there cross-legged in front of the wall, and slowly his face bursts into a smile like flames." Like the phoenix bird, Emmett will rise from the ashes of his dead life. The wall itself, with the millions of visitors yearly, pushes forward the nation's reconciliation. Most of the tourists are silent and reverent at our country's Wailing Wall. Through it the country is experiencing a healing catharsis.

This is a sophisticated analysis of the ending, but notice also how the student compares the ending to what is actually happening at "The Wall" in Washington, D.C, or, in other words, the world outside of the novel.

The final response is to one of the realistic, combat novel to come out of the war, James Webb's *Fields of Fire* (1978). It is an excerpt from an analytical character analysis essay.

> ... Senator's change in values was brought about mostly by the killing of New Mac which Senator feels was his fault. Senator recounts the story of New Mac's death to the two students who ask him to speak at the anti-war rally [at Harvard University]. He tells them,
>
> > A little babysan sucked me right out into the open so the NVA could start an ambush. I was a team leader. I had a kid who was going to shoot her. I knocked his rifle down. Just in time to see him shot in the face. Do you know how it feels to know you caused that. I'll see his face staring at that babysan the rest of my life.... If I hadn't had the shit blown out of me, it would have given me great pleasure to hunt that little girl down and blow her away (407).

> This is a very different Senator speaking than the one who refused to fire on fleeing figures [NVA soldiers] because they look like innocent villagers (157). Senator is admitting that it was his sense of morality that resulted in the death of New Mac. More importantly, he now realizes what the other men knew all along: that his loyalty belongs to those he served with, to those who were loyal to him, [and] ... it is this incident more than anything else that brought about this change in values. ...

Notice how this student, who is not an English major, is engaged in the kind of critical and ethical inquiry that we would like all of our students to engage in, but is very difficult to actually achieve.

I think you can see that these students learned some important lessons about the war from studying this literature; yet, what each learned is as much, or perhaps more, a powerful affective response as it is intellectual. These few samples of student responses are a testament to the potential impact that the best literature of the Vietnam War can have on our students. These responses indicate that having our students study some of these works can help them better understand the war, their parents, and how the legacies of the war continue to have an impact on their lives.

Student Interest and Response

There are a number of reasons why students have such powerful responses to this literature. One important reason is that students are interested in learning about the war (Christie, 1989; Johannessen, 1990, 1992, 1993, & 1995; and Kroll, 1992). For example, strong evidence for this

conclusion is that since 1989 a number of works dealing with the war have ranked in the top selections of Young Adults' Choices list in the International Reading Association's annual national survey of middle, junior high, and senior high school students (1989, 1990, 1991). In addition, at the college level, courses dealing with the Vietnam War are so popular that they have become staples of college curriculums (Johannessen, 1992; Kroll, 1992). My own experience is similar. I have taught various courses dealing with Vietnam War literature and usually these courses have been closed (or full) by the end of the first day of registration. Clearly, students want to know about the war, and, in part, it is their own interest in the subject that can provide an important first step toward enhancing their responses to this literature, or "Winning their Hearts and Minds," and perhaps provide a link to the other literature we teach.

Unfortunately, our students come to us with very little real knowledge of the war, and what little they do know is full of distortions (Christie, 1989; McCloud, 1989; Johannessen, 1990,1992, & 1993). Research indicates that most students are not learning about the war in their history classes and very few students have ever read a serious work of literature that deals with the war in an English class on their own (Johannessen, 1992). What little they do know about the war does not go much beyond Hollywood's *Rambo* series, or the various adventure novels, such as the Saigon Commando or Night Fighter series, in which Vietnam is merely a backdrop (Johannessen, 1993, 43), or the romantic novels, such as those by Ellen Elliot, Della Field, and Evelyn Hawkins--all called *Vietnam Nurse*--that Kathleen M. Puhr says are "little more than Harlequin romances set in Vietnam" (1988, 74).

The best example I have of students' lack of knowledge and distortions about the war took place in the fall of 1988. If you will recall, during the summer of that year, the Olympics were held in Seoul, South Korea. One of my students came up to me after class one day to ask me a question. "I think I understand all this stuff we are reading in the literature," she said, "but what I can't understand is if we lost this war against the Vietnamese, how could we send our athletes there last summer for the Olympics?" Obviously, this young lady had confused Vietnam with South Korea.

Ironically, most of our students know more about the Civil War than they do about the war that was the defining experience for their parents' generation and continues to shape society and their lives. So, what we have are students who are interested in learning about the war, but who come to us knowing very little and what little they do know is full of distortions. Having our students study some of these works might go far toward helping them to evaluate the romanticized and distorted views that they have acquired from the media and elsewhere, and as I said before, help them gain a better understanding of the war, their parents, and how the legacies of the war continue to have an impact on society and their lives. Ultimately, studying these works may help students to deal more effectively with the world they will encounter outside of school, and, as Fred A. Wilcox argues, "empower [them] to take responsibility for issues that affect their lives and the future of our planet" (1988, 40).

Deciding What to Teach

Fortunately, our students' desire to learn more about the Vietnam War is matched by a diversity of engaging literature that deals with the war and its aftermath. There are four main types of literature that have emerged in response to the Vietnam War: works that deal with the experience of Vietnam, or the combat narrative; literature that focuses on the war at home; novels that deal with the refugee experience; and works that focus on the legacies of the Vietnam War, particularly the impact of war on the children of the generation that came of age during the Vietnam War.

The next four pages of your handout (Appendix, pp. 59-62) contain an annotated bibliography of the literature that deals with the war. The first part of the bibliography divides the literature up by these four main types, and each entry contains full bibliographic information, a brief summary of the plot or contents, and sometimes key themes, any other information that may be important, and, a recommended teaching level for the work.

The Vietnam Experience

The combat narrative is perhaps the best known type of war literature. A number of authors have written works that attempt to portray the experience of fighting in Vietnam. Like some of the texts we already teach (*The Red Badge of Courage, A Farewell to Arms, All Quiet on the Western Front,* and *Catch-22* among them), these works demand that students think about what it really meant to live and fight in this war. For example, Walter Dean Myers's novel *Fallen Angels* (1988) focuses on seventeen-year-old Richard Perry's tour of duty in Vietnam in 1967. Looking for a better life than he had in Harlem, Perry joins the Army and is sent to the war zone. Despite his loneliness, confusion, fear, and at times, his

guilt for having lived when his fellow soldiers have not, Perry survives and comes to trust and care deeply for several of his companions. They give him courage and a reason to live. Myers skillfully integrates the themes of innocence, courage, initiation, and mortality in this compelling novel. Readers will emerge feeling that they have experienced 'Nam.

Another combat narrative that has a great deal to offer young readers is Tim O'Brien's memoir, *If I Die in a Combat Zone* (1989). First published in 1973, this new-journalism style narrative is now regarded by some as one of the classics of the war. This is the story of one foot soldier's journey from safe, middle class America to the center of the nightmare of the Vietnam War. O'Brien emphasizes the fear and hardships faced by soldier's fighting the war. Readers are pulled along as O'Brien wrestles with the moral issues he faces. For example, O'Brien comes to Vietnam regarding Frederic Henry, the hero of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms,* as one of his heroes. However, when O'Brien tries to apply Hemingway's definition of courage to his own situation, he has trouble making it work. In the end, he rejects Hemingway's definition and decides that true brave men are those who do well on the average and have perhaps a moment of glory. Readers learn what it was like to fight in Vietnam and, if taught in conjunction with other war literature, they clearly see how this literature is part of a literary heritage.

Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam (1986) edited by Bernard Edelman and *In the Combat Zone: An Oral History of American Women in Vietnam, 1966-1975* (1988) by Kathryn Marshall are two other adult books of interest to young adult readers. Edelman's book is a collection of letters home from those serving and working in Vietnam during the war. From soldiers to donut dollies (Red Cross workers), readers gain a clear sense of

what the war was like for those who lived it. Their letters show readers what the war was like for "cherries" (new soldiers in country), as well as what it was like on patrols in the "bush." There are letters from wounded soldiers and those who cared for them that explore the physical, mental, and spiritual wounds of the war. Finally, readers find themselves rejoicing with those who made it home, agonizing with those who were prisoners of war in North Vietnam, and weeping for those who never made it.

In recent years more and more women are telling what the war was like for them, and Marshall's oral history is certainly one of the best and most accessible for teenage readers. Based on Marshall's interviews with twenty women who served in Vietnam, the work delves into their motives for going to Vietnam, their experiences, and the impact that the war has had on their lives. These women include army nurses, Red Cross workers, and civilians living in Saigon. Readers are struck by the idealism that led many of these women to go to Vietnam and the dramatic impact that the war has had on their lives.

Having our students study one of these combat narratives that portray the war as it really was may go far toward helping them to reevaluate the romanticized views that they have acquired from the media and elsewhere.

The War at Home

As the war in Vietnam escalated, so did the fragmentations and polarization of people at home. Unfortunately, our students have very little knowledge of the events that took place at home during the Vietnam era. A number of writers have responded to this need with some excellent offerings that examine the effects of the war on the homefront. Meg

Wolitzer's novel *Caribou* (1986) takes place in 1970 and focuses on eleven-year-old Becca Silverman. The family, including her nineteen-year-old brother, Stevie, gather around the television set to watch the draft lottery. When Steve's birthdate is drawn first, the family's orderly life is plunged into tension and disorder. Eventually, Steve flees to Canada to avoid the draft, and Becca's father can't forgive him. Becca also speaks out against the war as she comes to understand herself and others as well.

Bob Greene's oral history *Homecoming: When the Soldiers Returned from Vietnam* (1990) is an adult book that is very appropriate for young adult readers. This book is a collection of letters by Vietnam veterans who wrote to author and syndicated columnist Greene in response to a question he asked his readers in his column. Greene had heard stories that Vietnam veterans claimed that when they came home from the war they were spat upon by people at home. He asked veterans to write him and tell him if the stories he had heard are true. Greene received hundreds of letters from veterans in response to his query which he collected in his book. The result is a work that examines the collision between the war in Asia and the war the veterans faced on American soil when they came home.

Marc Talbert's *The Purple Heart* (1992) is the story of a teenage boy whose father is a soldier in Vietnam. When Luke's father returns from the war, he expects a fearless John Wayne-type person to walk in the door. Even though he has won a medal for heroism, Luke can't see the fearless soldier in this tired, thin, haunted man. After Luke and his best friend play a prank on old Mrs. Pederson, they learn how war really affects people and discover that being brave is sometimes terrifying.

Far too many of our students seem willing to believe the myth that because the Vietnam War was fought far away from the shores of America,

it had little or no impact at home. Having our students study one of these works may help them understand some of the ways that the Vietnam War has touched everyone.

Legacies I: The Refugee Experience

Since the fall of the Saigon government to the Communists in April 1975, more than two million Vietnamese people have fled Vietnam. More than a million of these "boat people" have immigrated to the United States. Our increasingly multi-cultural classrooms are filled with Southeast Asian students who are part of this still continuing refugee experience. A number of adolescent fiction writers have written about this experience. In *A Boat to Nowhere* (1981), Maureen Crane Wartski does an admirable job of describing some of the many hardships and dangers some of the first "boat people" confronted in trying to escape from Vietnam. This novel details the adventures of Thay Van Chi, his family, and an orphan boy, Kien, during their escape from Vietnam. Kien suddenly appears in a tiny fishing village. Thay protects the orphan whose parents were killed in the war. When the Vietcong arrive in the village, Kien uses his survival skills to help the family escape in a fishing boat. Once at sea, they are attacked by Thai pirates, receive a hostile reception in a coastal village in Thailand, are betrayed by other refugees at Outcast Island, and are rejected by the crew of an American tanker. Eventually, the family and Kien are rescued by an American freighter with sailors sympathetic to their plight.

Jamie Gilson's *Hello, My Name Is Scrambled Eggs* (1988) examines some of the difficulties refugees experience once they reach the United States. This novel centers on Tuan Nguyen who is a Vietnamese refugee who

arrives in America to live with the Trumble family in a small town in the midwest. Harvey Trumble is a seventh grader who tries to mold Tuan into an "American kid." Tuan has many difficulties adjusting, and conflicts develop between Tuan and Harvey. Ultimately, the boys become friends, and they both learn and grow as a result of their experiences.

In studying one of these works, students learn important lessons about the Vietnam War and its aftermath; and, in light of our multi-cultural classrooms, students may also learn some important cultural lessons about their fellow students. In fact, Norma H. Mandel (1988) reports that when she had one of her multi-cultural high school English classes read Wartski's *A Boat to Nowhere*, she was able to foster a very positive exchange of cultural information and personal feelings among her students that until she taught the novel had been suppressed (40).

Legacies II: The Next Generation

Since the mid-1980's, the nation has at last been willing to remember the experience of Vietnam. Memorials to Vietnam veterans have been built, ticker-tape parades to honor Vietnam veterans have been held throughout the country, popular films dealing with the war have been released, and popular books about the war have been published. Despite our willingness to remember the war, we have not been so willing to consider some of the many legacies of the war. An obvious example is the fact that Vietnam veterans account for more than one-third of all homeless people in America. This is an astonishing statistic, and what is even more astonishing is that few seem willing to address this issue. However, a number of authors have addressed this problem and other legacies of the Vietnam War. Mary

Downing Hahn tackles the homeless veterans issue in her novel *December Stillness*(1990). Kelly McAllister is fifteen years old and bored with the routine of school when she encounters Mr. Weems, a traumatized, homeless Vietnam War veteran. Despite warnings from her family and friends, Kelly attempts to befriend Weems. In the process of helping him, Kelly grows emotionally and acquires social awareness and responsiblity.

A number of novels attempt to deal with the impact of the war on the family, particularly on the children of those who served in Vietnam. Premier among these works is Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country*(1989). Shortly after graduating from high school, Samatha Hughes, the protagonist of Mason's novel, at last confronts Vietnam. Her father was killed there before she was born. Sam's Uncle Emmett, with whom she lives, returned from the war, but he has never been able to hold a job, start a family or adjust to the mainstream of American life. Sam suspects that his headaches and skin rash are symptoms of Agent Orange. She queries the adults around her for answers about the war and her father. Her quest culminates in a trip from her small town in Kentucky to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D. C. Sam is united with her father, Emmett, and herself in a moving final scene at the Memorial.

While *In Country* (1989) ends at "the Wall," *Park's Quest* by Katherine Patterson (1989) begins there. The Memorial sustains Park's search to learn about his father who was killed in Vietnam. The summer after "the Wall" is dedicated, Park travels to his grandfather's farm to learn more about his father. What he finds is a Vietnamese-American girl named Thanh. She is a survivor of war and the refugee camps. She is tough and fears that Park may disrupt the family and the good life she and her mother have found in America. As the plot unfolds, Park learns that Thanh may be

his half-sister, and they both discover that they have more in common than reasons to fear and distrust one another. The novel gives readers a second generation to help heal the wounds of the war.

Larry Bograd's *Traveler's*(1986) is another offering that focuses on children who lost parents in the war. In this novel, a high school-students is haunted by the image of a father he never knew. When the boy tries to find out more about him from adults, they avoid his questions. Ultimately, the teenager learns about his father, the war, and how much pain the war has caused his family and others in the community.

Kathryn Jensen's *Pocket Change*(1990) focuses on the devastating effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder on veterans and their families. Young Josie's life begins to crumble when her father's increasingly erratic and violent behavior threatens the family. In trying to help him, Josie pieces together clues from his past and becomes convinced that his strange behavior is the result of experiences in the Vietnam War that still haunt him. When she confronts him with her suspicions, the result is a chilling climax that leads to a satisfying ending. Readers see how this legacy of the war continues to haunt veterans and their families.

One book that deals directly with the many lessons of the Vietnam War is Bill McCloud's *What Should We Tell Our Children about Vietnam?* (1989). McCloud is a Vietnam veteran and a junior high school social studies teacher. He wondered what to tell his students about Vietnam. He wrote to the people who directed, fought, and protested the war: soldiers, anti-war protesters, politicians, writers, and journalists. McCloud asked them what he should tell his students. The book is a collection of 128 of the letters he received. They form a remarkable and very readable historical record. The book contains letters from the likes of McGeorge Bundy, Jimmy Carter, Clark

Clifford, Barry Goldwater, Tom Hayden, John Hersey, Henry Kissinger, Timothy Leary, Country Joe McDonald, Dean Rusk, Oliver Stone, Kurt Vonnegut, and William Westmoreland.

Having our students read one or more of these works that deal with the aftermath of the war will help them to understand some of the legacies of the Vietnam War, and perhaps begin the process of healing the wounds of the war.

Some Important and Teachable Vietnam War Literature

The last section of the annotated bibliography contains some of the most important and teachable literature of the Vietnam War. Most of these works are combat narratives, the first type of literature I talked about. These works demand that students think about what it really meant to live and fight in this war.

A number of important memoirs have come out of the war. For example, Ron Kovic's, *Born on the Fourth of July* (1977), is a very important and teachable work. Kovic describes his idealistic enlistment in the Marines, his service in Vietnam, his painful return home in a wheelchair, his treatment at the hands of the Veterans Administration, and his involvement in the antiwar movement.

Another important autobiography is Lynda Van Devanter's, *Home Before Morning: The Story of an Army Nurse in Vietnam* (1983). This is a powerful narrative in which the author describes her tour of duty in Vietnam, how she lost her idealism, the problems she had had when she returned home, including being treated as "a murderer rather than a healer," and her experiences with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

I have also listed important novels such as Tim O'Brien's recent *The Things They Carried* (1990). This novel is a series of fictional episodes in which the narrator and characters describe and reflect on what happened to them in Vietnam and twenty years later. The book explores the human heart and reflects on the terrible weight of those things people carry through their lives. I know two secondary teachers who have had a great deal of success with this novel.

Another important and teachable novel is James Webb's *Fields of Fire* (1978). In this realistic novel, the author focuses on a Marine unit and follows them as they fight the enemy, endure unbelievable living conditions. Webb examines the reasons each man became a Marine and explores the difficulties veterans faced when they returned home.

Having our students study one of these important works gives them an opportunity to study the best literature to come out of the war, and may also help them understand some of the ways that the war has touched everyone.

Teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War

How we go about teaching the war, the literature of the Vietnam War, is extremely important. As Barry Kroll (1992) indicates in his book on teaching the Vietnam War and war literature to college students, the excitement of teaching this literature--the outstanding student responses he got--comes about when students are "engaged by [the] topic" and "encouraged" or taught "to inquire into it." The instructional approaches I will be sharing with you are approaches that encourage engagement and critical inquiry.

The Vietnam Experience

If you will turn to the next page of your handout (p. 63), I'll show you one way you might think about organizing instruction to teach the combat narrative of the Vietnam War. As I have suggested, literature that focuses on the Vietnam War has tremendous appeal to young people. Besides the fact that young people want to learn more about the Vietnam War, one reason for this may be that one of the most compelling ways in which this literature speaks to students is through the voice of the narrator. Another reason may be that much of this literature focuses on the adolescent experience (Johannessen 1992, 7, 1993, 48, & 1995, 377).

Take the case of the combat narrative: at first glance this type of work might appear to be very far removed from the experience of most teenagers. However, Jacqueline E. Lawson (1988) points out that most scholars now recognize that Vietnam was "our nation's first teen-age war." The average age of the American combatant in Vietnam was nineteen years as compared with twenty-six years for the soldier in World War II (26). As a result, many of the combat narratives of the Vietnam War, unlike those from World War II, focus on the adolescent experience--that of naive youths who are transformed by their experiences--viewed through the eyes of someone not much older than most high school students. In other words, in many ways this literature seems to students to speak with the voice of someone much like themselves, exploring some of the same kinds of struggles they are facing. For example, the narrator and main character of Myers' *Fallen Angels* is seventeen-year-old Richard Perry. As with our own students, one of his concerns is to determine what it means to be a friend, to really care deeply about another human being. As Richie Perry confronts

this issue, he and another soldier, Peewee, find themselves cut off from their platoon and surrounded by Vietcong. It is night. They are both terrified, and as they decide what they will do and prepare for an expected attack by the enemy, Peewee reaches out and puts his hand on Richie's wrist. Richie asks Peewee what is wrong.

> "Nothing," he whispered back.
>
> He kept his hand on my wrist. I moved my hand and took his. We held hands in the darkness. (1988, 285)

This moving scene, told from the viewpoint of seventeen-year-old Richie, represents his final step in understanding what it means to be someone's friend. They are caught in the absolute worst of circumstances, and in this situation they reach out to help and comfort one another. In terms of the combat narrative, this is certainly the theme of brotherhood in war, but for our teenage students this is an important lesson in friendship--a lesson that is taught to them not by a twenty-six year-old adult soldier landing on the beach at Normandy in World War II, but rather by another teenager who is fighting in a confusing jungle war, which seems to be much like their own confusing world.

Many of the combat narratives follow the contours of the narrative of education or *Bildungsroman,* at the heart of which is the one year (or thirteen months in the case of Marines) tour of duty in Vietnam (Herzog, 1992; Johannessen, 1992; Lawson, 1988).

The narrative of educaton, or the process of becoming what one literary scholar describes as an "old kid" (Lawson, 1988) occurs in five or six stages, which provide the infrastructure for these narratives. As the

handout indicates, these stages are: (1) the mystique of pre-induction; (2) the initiation into military culture in boot camp; (3) the dislocation of arrival in Vietnam; (4) the confrontation with mortality in the first firefight; (5) experience and consideration; and (6) the phenomenon of coming home, or as Mark Baker describes it, at the end of their tours of duty the soldiers that left Vietnam were "nineteen-year-old bodies with thirty-five-year-old minds" (1981, 130).

This narrative structure suggests an overall approach to teaching the combat narrative. It suggests logicial ways to make reading assignments, to organize class discussions and other activities, and to explore important thematic and structural elements with students. The sheet that I am giving you contains key questions for study and discussing each of these stages, and depending on the particular work, I have included questions that focus on structure, literary style, and literary techniques. I think you can see that this provides the basis for an overall plan for teaching literature that focuses on the Vietnam experience, or the adolescent experience in combat literature of the Vietnam War.

Follow-up Writing

If you will skip the next page and go to the writing assignments on the following page of your handout (p. 65), I would like to show you some writing asssignments I have provided you with that work with many of the combat narratives listed in the bibliography. Most of these assignments follow directly from the instruction, the overall approach that I have shown you.

The first assignment is analytical and asks students to interpret what the author wants readers to understand about the Vietnam War. (Read assignment.) The assignment follows directly from key questions on the Vietnam Experience handout involving the central meaning of the work.

I'd like to skip the second assignment for the time being because it involves the handout on the previous page which I will get to shortly.

The third assignment focuses on character analysis and asks students to explain how the protagonist changes as a result of his or her experiences in the war. (Read assignment.) Again, this assignment follows directly for the questions on the "Vietnam Experience" sheet.. If you are interested, you might want to take a look at my book, *Illumination rounds: Teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War* (Urbana: NCTE, 1992), which contains a whole series of activities designed to give students additional preparation for this assignment. The last student response for James Webb's *Fields of Fire* was written in response to this assignment.

The fourth assignment combines some literary analysis with personal responses. (Read.) It asks students to think about what they have learned about the war as a result of reading a particular work.

Again, I'd like to skip the fifth assignment for the moment because it involves the activity on the previous page.

The last assignment is also personal response. (Read.) It asks students to think about some of the themes and issues in the work that are still with us today and to consider what can be done to heal the wounds of war.

Obviously, these assignments are only meant as suggestions for some different ways to get students to think about and respond to these works.

Besides the two novels I have specifically mentioned, nearly all of the combat narratives I discussed earlier, and those listed in the "Annotated Bibliography" that I did not discuss might be taught using this approach. The important point is that combining appropriate and engaging instruction with literature that is of interest to students, results in high levels of student involvement, and thoughtful and insightful student responses. As my colleague, Candy Carter, who regularly teaches Vietnam War Literature, reports, her students' responses to Vietnam War literature are "nothing short of electric" (Carter, 1991).

Confronting "The Horror! The Horror!"

Tobey Herzog (1992) argues that at least two things converge to create moral dilemma's for soldier's who fought in Vietnam. First, as I have explained, there is movement from innocence through experience, which Herzog maintains involves "an agonizing consideration of the realities and ironies of war," which he likens to Marlow's confronting "the horror" or moral conflict and psychic journey in Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*. Secondly, the unusual nature of the war, or guerrilla war (small unit war lacking a definite front and rear, and the brutal and impersonal nature of guerrilla war (along with other factors) combined to create very high levels of frustration and battle stress for soldiers. The problem is that students sometimes have difficulty understanding why some of the soldiers seem to be or become so callous toward civilians and the enemy. As one soldier writes in a letter home in *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam* (1986): "After awhile, instead of a yellow streak, you develop a mean streak"; or, as another soldier said in a letter home: "[After awhile,] it is so easy to kill in a

war." "The Soldier's Dilemma" activity (p. 64) is designed to help students with this particularly troubling aspect of a soldier's education or movement from innocence to experience. Another way to think about it is that at some point in their tour of duty every soldier has to confront a moral choice that is a key part of his experience.

I would like you to do this activity somewhat as I have students do it. Normally, I would pass this out to students just prior to starting or just after we have started a major combat narrative. First, let us read over the case together (read the case aloud). Now, I would like you all to spend the next ten minutes or so writing out your answers to the questions posed at the end. (Give participants time to write out answers and get some paper to write one.) It is really important that you do the writing. Thank you, I appreciate it.

Now, I wonder if I could ask a few of you to read your compositions? Would someone else read theirs? Someone else? Could I have someone else read theirs who has a different viewpoint? Did anyone else come up with a different solution? Could you read yours?

Let's talk about some of your solutions to this problem. (Lead discussion using the following discussion questions as a guide):

"The Soldier's Dilemma": Discussion Questions

1. If Dillon holds his fire, why does the fact that the people in his squad are his "friends" make a difference (or does that make a difference)?

2. If Dillon decides to shoot the woman, and it turns out that she was just an innocent peasant woman caught in bad circumstances, and she is dead, do you think he has done anything wrong? Why or why not?

3. If Dillon killed an innocent civilian, would you be willing to call him a murderer? Why or why not? If yes, what should his punishment be? Why?

4. If Dillon decides not to shoot the woman, and it turns out that she was a guerrilla soldier who set off a mine or booby trap, and some of his fellow soldiers are killed and wounded, do you think he has done anything wrong? Why or why not?

5. If Dillon fails to shoot the woman and some of his fellow soldiers are killed and wounded as a result of his failure to shoot, would you be willing to say that he has committed a crime? Why or why not? What crime has he committed and what should his punishment be? Why?

6. What do you think the morals of war are? What guidelines or criteria can someone use to live by in war?

Once all students that want to have had a chance to read their paper and participate in the discussion, you should tell them that characters in the work have to confront similar situations, and that they should examine how they react in these situations, and try to determine the impact that these

experiences have on characters and what the author is trying to tell us about the Vietnam War and war in general through these situations.

As a variation on the format I outlined for you, after students have written out their responses, you might have them meet in small groups to read their compositions, and you might have them either pick one composition that they will read to the class, or have them discuss their responses and try to reach a consensus as to their answers to the questions prior to the whole class discussion.

This kind of activity helps to prepare students for the themes and issues that they will encounter in their reading and also helps them to understand the characters.

Follow-up Writing

If you'll turn to the next page of your handout (Appendix, p. 65), I'd like to show you some very interesting follow-up writing assignments based on this activity. I want to focus on two of the assignments you see here. First, keep in mind that as we read and discuss the work we often refer back to "The Soldier's Dilemma." We compare similar situations in the novel and we talk about how and why various characters and the author might answer the questions posed at the end of the case. So, after they have finished the work, I give students the second assignment. (Read.) I think you can readily see how doing the activity prior to their reading and how discussing similar situations in the novel and how characters and the author would answer the questions in the case helps prepare students for this assignment. I have gotten some very interesting and insightful responses to this assignment.

Assignment number five also involves the case. I often collect their writing on the case prior to their reading of the work, and then I hand them back to them when I give them this assignment. (Read.) Again, I think you can see how the pre-reading activity and follow up discussions as students read helps prepare them for this assignment. More important, we rarely ask students to reflect on the impact that a work of literature has had on them. This kind of assignment specifically asks students to do that. I would argue that we ought to give students more assignments like this one.

Teaching Nonfiction Combat Narratives of the Vietnam War

As I previously stated, young people are drawn to the combat narratives of the war because of the voice of the narrator and the nature of the experience that is the focus of many of these works. This is particularly true for many of the personal narratives, collected letters, and oral histories. In fact, one of the real strengths of this type of literature is that it is accessible to nearly all students. The speakers of these works establish a confidential, intimate relationship with the reader, in a voice that seems to be speaking directly to them. In addition, the voice of these works is one which contains the persuasive power of truth telling that only an eyewitness can claim (Lawson, 1988).

And again, the heart of these works is the adolescent experience. In addition, because of their youth, many of these young people were not mentally prepared for the carnage and terror that marked the Vietnam experience. As a result, in writing about their experiences, these young people speak of the idealism, loneliness, homesickness, fear, terror, feelings

of isolation and abandonment, and of betrayal in ways that speak directly to our students.

My own students speak of their fascination with these works and how much the speakers seem just like them. In fact, oral historian Mark Baker, author of *Nam*, probably best describes the typical student reaction to these works when he recounts his own reaction to interviewing veterans for his oral history:

> There was an aura about the people who were over there. These guys were kids, but they weren't kids. There was something in their eyes that made them absolutely different. I was fascinated, mesmerized by these guys. I couldn't take my eyes of them. There was something very old about them, but I still felt like a kid. (1981, 62)

Again, many of the nonfiction works of the war follow the contours of the narrative of education or *Bildungsroman*, at the heart of which is the year-long tour of duty (Lawson, 1988). This overall structure is enhanced by each veteran's desire to tell his story and the need to understand what, exactly happened to him or her, or to explain, in absolute terms, the effect of having, as Philip Caputo says in his memoir, *A Rumor of War*, "a lifetime of experience compressed into a year and a half" (1977, 4).

If you'll turn to the next three pages of your handout (Appendix, pp. 66-69), I'll show one way you might set up instruction based on the narrative of education to teach Al Santoli's oral history *Everything We Had: An oral History of the Vietnam War by Thirty-three American Soldiers Who*

Fought It (1981), and this same approach works with many other nonfiction narratives of the war.

I begin the work by assigning students to read the "Preface" and the first chapter of the work titled, "Gathering Clouds." After students have read these sections, I lead a class discussion using the "Discussion Questions" in your handout (p. 66). You might also use these questions as a study guide or you might want to have students answer them in small groups before leading a whole class discussion of their responses. What is important about the questions is that they get at the specifics of the of the second and third stages of the overall structure of the narrative of education I just described to you, the initiation into military culture and the dislocation of arrival in Vietnam or culture shock. For example, questions #7 and #8 partially focuse on the problem of culture shock. The speakers talk about their disorientation upon their arrival in Vietnam and the fact that they didn't speak the language or understand the people they encountered, and as a result, they felt even more disoriented.

After I guide students through the first part of the work, I assign them to read the rest of it. Then, I give them the "Small Group Assigment" you see in your handout (p. 67). (Read directions.) As the directions indicate, I assign students to small groups to report to the class on a particular section of the book. The groups have a set of generic questions that are, in part, designed to help students understand the themes and structure in their assigned section.

I give students class time to work on their oral presentations and then they give their presentations in the order they are listed on the sheet. As the groups take the class through their assigned sections, students begin to formulate conclusions about the war and the nature of the Vietnam

experience. For example, one issue that students always want to discuss is the cumulative effect of the war on the young people who went to Vietnam. They see how idealistic youths, motivated by patriotism or idealism, are transformed by the war. They see how these young people lost their innocence and returned home as "old kids" or as Mark Baker describes them in his oral history, "Nineteen-year-old bodies with thirty-five-year-old minds" (1981, 130).

Other questions on the assignment sheet have a very different purpose. For example, sometimes these works have such an emotional impact on students that it is important to examine how they achieve their emotional power. Question #9, then, is designed to help students think about their initial responses. In addition, there are also questions that ask students to consider the author's arrangement of materials, and how the work may or may not contribute to the historical record.

The Writing Connection

The next page of your handout (Appendix, p. 68) contains the follow up writing assignments I have used with this work. Once again, I have provided you with a variety of kinds of writing assignments that you might want to use.

The first assignment is an analytical assignment in which students are asked to indirectly write about the stages of the Vietnam experience or narrative of education. (Read assignment.) I think you can see how this assignment follows directly from the work students have done in their small groups and class discussions of their findings. Because oral histories tend to be direct than fictional works, many students do quite well with this type of

analytical assignment. Often, their success with this assignment translates into more effective analytical essays about more complex literature we study later on.

The focus of the second assignment is directly related to some of the questions from their small group assignment sheet and is important for some other reasons as well. For example, one of the questions that sometimes comes up in class, and sometimes comes from parents is, "Why are you reading oral history in English class?" (Read assignment.) As you can see, this analytical assignment asks students to consider the work as a work of literature and/or history. It allows students considerable freedom to answer the question. I have had some interesting, insightful, and unusual papers from students.

The third assignment is also analytical and follows directly from students' work in their small groups. (Read assignment.) While many students write about the aspect of the Vietnam experience that they worked on in their small groups, some end up writing about an aspect of the Vietnam experience that they were particularly interested in or were inspired to examine because of what other small groups have presented.

The fourth assignment asks students to do some original research, and, as you will see, it too follows directly from the work students have previously done on *Everything We Had*. (Read assignment.) With this assignment, students must utilize the knowledge they have gained in reading the work and apply it to the real world. This kind of assignment has tremendous appeal for students. Many teachers who have had their students do oral history projects like the assignment described here report that the results are almost always beyond what they had expected (Carter, 1989 & 1991, Oldham, 1986).

Finally, the fifth assignment involves personal response. (Read assignment.) In this instance, students are asked to write about a traumatic experience that, like the experiences described by veterans, forced them to confront their own mortality, or made them old before their time. In doing this assignment, students often write about having to deal with the loss of a loved one, or, in many cases, write about having to deal with a moral issue involving right and wrong.

An important point to keep in mind about the writing assignments I have shown you is that all of them have their roots in the activities, the instruction, that preceeds them. These are not assignments for the sake of giving assignments. They are designed to enable students to use and extend the knowledge they have gained in studying the work. They are designed to connect reading and writing (something that we do all too rarely in our English classes) and encourage inquiry, the different kinds of inquiry Kroll talks about in his book.

Besides Santoli's work there are a number of other oral histories and personal narratives, you might want to try using the approach I have described. Some of the works will require some modifications, but most can be taught using the overall approach I have described. Listed in the "Annotated Bibliography," (Appendix, pp. 59-62) are some of the nonfiction works that work well with this approach: Mark Baker's, *NAM: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There*, Philip Caputo's, *A Rumor of War*, Ron Kovic's, *Born on the Fourth of July*, Michael Herr's, *Dispatches*, Tim O'Brien's, *If I Die in a Combat Zone*, Kathryn Marshall's, *In the Combat Zone: An Oral History of American Women in Vietnam*, and Lynda Van Devanter's, *Home Before Morning: The Story of an Army Nurse in Vietnam*.

Teaching the Legacies of the Vietnam War: Vietnamese Refugees

As I previously indicated, since the fall of Saigon in April 1975, more than two million refugees have fled Vietnam and more than one million of these refugees have settled in the United States. It might surprise some of you to learn that right now, more than twenty years after the fall of the Saigon government, the U.S. is still involved in helping refugees leave Vietnam and immigrate to the United States and other western nations. Our increasingly multicultural classrooms are filled with Southeast Aian students who are part of this continuing refugee experience. The next activity that I would like to show you and the novel that goes along with it is designed to key into students' views about immigrants and immigration, and use their ideas and opinions to engage or interest them in a work that focuses on the experiences of Southeast Asian war refugees. In addition, this approach focuses on the key themes and issues that are typically dealt with in works that deal with the Southeast Asian refugee experience. For example, this particular novel, Jamie Gilson's *Hello, My Name is Scrambled Eggs* is concerned with the difficulties refugees face once they reach the United States. Students see some of the problems these people encounter with a different language, culture, and value system. Ultimately, the instruction I am going to show you and studying this work can help students develop an excellent base from which cultural awareness and appreciation can develop.

"Legacies of the Vietnam War: Vietnamese Refugees" Opinionnaire [3]

If you will turn to the next page of your handout (p. 69), I'd like to show you how this activity works in the classroom and how this type of activity engages students in the literature they are about to read, prepares them for problems they will encounter in their reading, and helps prepare students for writing. The "Legacies of the Vietnam War: Vietnamese Refugees" opinionnaire is designed to be used not just with the Jamie Gilson's *Hello, My Name Is Scrambled Eggs*, but with any number of works dealing with the experiences of refugees from the wars in Southeast Asia. The point is that this kind of activity is very versitile. Add, modify, or eliminate a couple of statements and it can be used to introduce any number of short works dealing with the same themes, another longer work, a unit, or a course.

As I have said, the novel deals with the difficulties encountered by refugees moving into a new country with a different language, value system, and culture. The story also shows that being someone's friend isn't always easy. Seventh grader Harvey Trumble makes this discovery when a Vietnamese family moves into his small Illinois town, stays with the Trumbles temporarily, and Harvey gets chosen to befriend Tuan, a fellow seventh grader. Harvey was looking forward to having a friend or "a kid of his own" who would "think just like [him]." But things didn't work out the way he had planned. He never knew that the kid would think that a hair dryer was a weapon, or, be afraid of an ecalator, just because the steps moved. Harvey was even more surprised when Tuan got very upset with him when the local police caught them wrapping the town pig (a statue) with rolls of colored toilet paper. Harvey was just trying to show him how to have fun. Ultimately, Harvey gains insight and appreciation for what life as a refugee was like when Tuan reveals the details of the family's escape from

the war raging in Vietnam. Finally, Harvey begins to understand some of the values of other cultures, and realizes that no person can belong to someone else.

How Students View Vietnamese Refugees and Other Legacies of the War

This opinionnaire utilizes students' ideas and opinions about refugees and the legacies of the Vietnam War. It forces students to agree or disagree with a series of statements about these issues. A number of statements on the opinionnaire are keyed to ideas and themes students will encounter in their reading.

Before students start reading the novel, I have them fill out the opinionnaire on their own. Then, I compile the results on the board, by counting up the number of students who agree and disagree with each statement on the opinionnaire. Then, beginning with the statements for which there is the most disagreement, I lead a class discussion that focuses on students' responses to each statement. I encourage students to explain the reasoning behind their responses and to debate differing opinions. Since the statements on the opinionnaire require students to take a stand, a lively discussion invariably ensues.

An interesting modification of the procedures I have described is to have students meet in small groups after completing the opinionnaire on their own and have them try to reach a consensus on their responses before the whole class discussion.

The disagreement over the statements that is created in the classroom is an important factor in interesting or engaging students in the literature. At the end of the discussion of the opinionnaire, the teacher might use the

disagreement with a statement like, "I see that we have considerable disagreement over statements #5 and #15 (read statements). Let's read the novel and find out which viewpoint is correct." Students are motivated to read because they want to find out if their view of the best way to adjust to a new culture is correct.

A second purpose of the opinionnaire and the follow-up discussion is to create interest in the characters and and themes in the stories students are about to read. For example, the two statements I just read relate to one problem Harvey is confronted with in trying to help Tuan fit in. Harvey thinks it might be easier for Tuan to fit in if he changes his name to Tom. What Harvey doesn't realize is how important names are to a person's identify. Harvey's attempt fails and he ultimately realizes that he should have been more sensitive to Tuan and the importance of his name.

Some student responses to item #5 and others on the opinionnaire related to this issue usually indicate that many of them believe that it is a good idea for new immigrants to take an American name to make it easier to fit in. Through the discussion, not just deciding if they agree or disagree with these statements on the opinionnaire, students begin to question some of their initial responses and are motivated to find out how characters will deal with these issues in the stories.

One way that the activity helps students to begin to understand what the author wants them to understand about Vietnamese refugees and the legacies of the Vietnam War is related to the simplistic views many students have about cultural differences. They simply have no conception of how people from other cultures think, feel, or believe. For example, many students cannot conceive that someone from a war-torn third-world country might mistake a hair dryer for some kind of gun and be terrified by it. In

the discussion of the opinionnaire, students are often surprised to discover that at least some of their peers can understand why someone from an underdeveloped country might find many of our modern conveniences at least a cause for concern (Statement #11). This statement, and others on the opinionnaire, help students come to the work with a framework or context that will better enable them to understand the novel they are about to read. They don't need to know the complete history of the Vietnam War.

One other interesting aspect of how the opinionnaire works, how it gets students to think and begin to question some of their initial responses, involves the way some of the statements are set up. In marking their answers, students, without realizing it, often contradict themselves. For example, it is not uncommon for a student to agree with statements #5 and disagree with #15 (read statements). As the discussion develops, however, students often realize (on their own or as a result of their peers pointing it out) that they have a contradiction in thought. It is not uncommon for one students to tell another, "How can you say it is a good idea to take an American name and that you shouldn't try to americanize new immigrants as quickly as possible." These statements encourage disagreement or discussion and get students thinking about the issues and themes in the novel.

After discussing most or all of the statements on the opinionnaire, I have students start reading the novel. One modification of the procedures I have described is to have students meet in small groups and have them try to reach a consensus on their anwers before the whole class discussion.

A Conceptual Framework for Study of the Novel

One of the important values of the opinionnaire is that it provides a map or conceptual framework for studying some key aspects of the novel. As students read the novel, you can have them fill out the opinionnaire according to how various characters would respond to the statements: Harvey Trimble, Tuan Nguyen, Jeff Zito, Quint, Mr. Trimble, Mrs. Trimble, Mrs. Nguyen, and Mr. Nguyen. This will enable them to better understand the characters in the novel, and ultimately, enable them to interpret what the author wants readers to understand about Southeast Asian refugees and and other legacies of the Vietnam War. After they complete the opinionnaire for a character, I lead a class discussion of their responses. I also ask them to cite evidence from the novel to support their viewpoints.

Discussions of how various characters would respond to the statements are nearly as lively as those that deal with how students themselves repond to the statements. One reason for this is that students have thought about these issues prior to reading and have already gained confidence in discussing them in class. In addition, the statements on the opinionnaire provide students with specific and concrete ways to talk about the actions and motives of characters.

One of the interesting things about these discussions is that many students cite similarities between the opinions of their parents and friends and those of various characters in the novel. Without prompting on your part, you will likely find, as I have, that many students go beyond the text. They apply what they are learning to their own lives.

Once students have finished the novel, I ask them to do two more things with the opinionnaire. First, I ask them to fill it out based on how they think the author would. Again, I lead a class discussion of their answers. This lively discussion will take students back to the text to find

support for how they think the author would respond. Ultimately, discussing how the author would respond to the statements on the opinionnaire leads to a consideration of what the author is trying to say about the war and the aftermath of the war, and because of their previous work, this discussion will be at a high level.

Finally, I ask students to fill out the opinionnaire again for themselves and I have them compare their responses to how they responded before they read the novel. Very often opinions have changed. For example, in looking back at how they had marked the sixteen statements on the opinionnaire prior to reading the novel, nearly every student usually changes their opinion on at least one statement as a result of their study. Lead a class discussion asking them to explain how and why their opinions have changed. This discussion is important because it helps students begin to see the impact that this literature has had on them.

The Writing Connection

If you will look at the next page of your handout, "*Hello, My Name Is Scrambled Eggs* Writing Asignments" (p. 70), I'll describe some of the assignments I have used with these pre-reading and reading activities, and how they also encourage effective writing.

Keep in mind what has taken place so far. Students have discussed the statements on the opinionnaire prior to reading. This discussion establishes the context, or helps to prepare students for interpreting the novel, and engages them in the characters and themes. Then, as students read the novel, they discussed how the characters would have responded to the statements on the opinionnaire. After they have finished the novel,

students discussed how the author would have responded to the items on the opinionnaire. Finally, students discussed how their own responses have or have not changed as a result of having studied the novel.

The disagreement over what the author probably would have said about the statements provides a natural follow-up writing situation, assignment 1. (Read assignment.) Students are motivated in this writing situation because it is real. They are writing to a real audience--their peers! It follows directly out of what they have done in the discussions of the opinionnaire, so they have rehersed arguments, presented evidence and reasoning to support their interpretations, and heard refutations of their viewpoints. They are ready to write. And, they have a reason to write--to convince their peers to change their concusions. This is literary analysis as it should be.

Another possible follow-up writing activity is to have students write an interpretive essay about the novel. (Read assignment 2.) In this assignment, students are asked to interpret what the author is trying to say about the aftermath and the legacies of the war. Students typically do well with this assignment because the opinionnaire discussion activities have helped students to make interpretations and turn their interpretations into written analytical essays. They gain confidence as a result of their participation in the sequence of discussion activities I have described.

The third assignment focuses on character analysis and asks students to explain how the main character changes as a result of his experiences. (Read assignment.) While the opinionnaire activities do help students with this assignment, I really think there are some other things you might want to do to prepare students. If you ar interested, you might want to take a look at my book, *Illumination Rounds: Teaching the Literature of the*

Vietnam War (Urbana: NCTE, 1992), which contains a whole series of activities designed to prepare students for this assignment.

Assignment 4 follows directly from the class discussion of how students' opinions have or have not changed as a result of reading the novel. (Read assignment.) This assignment is both a personal response and involves some literary analysis. Students have success with this assignment because they have thought about and discussed their opinions before reading and after reading the novel, and they are able to explain how their opinions have changed as a result of reading it. Without the opinionnaire activity before reading the novel that requires them to articulate and defend their opinions, their written responses to this assignment would not be very good.

Assignment 5 is a creative and analytical assignment. (Read assignment.) Students usually have little difficultly with and have fun with this assignment because the chapters tend to focus on a single theme or issue that lend themselves to renaming and are directly related to the opinionnaire dicussion activities.

The last assignment asks for a personal response to the novel. (Read assignment.) It follows directly from the discissions prior to, during, and after their reading. In these discussions students are rehersing what they are going to be asked to do in this writing assignment.

I am not trying to argue for one assignment over another. It really depends on your students and your situation, you might want to give just one of these assignments, or you might want to give them a choice between two or more assignments. What I want you to see is how the activities I have described helps to prepare students for reading and writing, engages them in reading and responding to the novel, helps them to interpret the

novel, helps them to transform their interpretations into sophisticated written responses, and, perhaps most important of all, helps them to relate what they are reading to their own lives.

Legacies: The Next Generation: *December Stillness*

In recent years, more and more authors of literature that deals with the Vietnam War have begun to write about the many legacies of the war. One of the most interesting and teachable of these works is Mary Downing Hahn's *December Stillness* (1990). As I previously mentioned, this novel, which was a 1990 ALA preferred choice by Young Adult readers, delves into the homeless veterans issue. In addition, this novel also attempts to deal with the impact of the war on the family, particularly on the children of those who served in Vietnam.

If you'll turn to the next page of your handout (p. 71), I'll show you one way you might approach teaching this novel. As I mentioned previously, this novel focuses on thirteen year old Kelly McAllister. It is a novel about growing up. In the process of attempting to help Mr. Weems, a traumatized, homeless Vietnam Veteran, Kelly grows emotionally and acquires a social awareness and responsibility. In addition, it is a novel of reconciliation. In a moving final scene at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D. C., Kelly's father, who is a Vietnam Veteran, is able to come to terms with the war, and this enables him to reconcile with his daughter Kelly.

This opinionnaire activity is based on a simple idea. Students have opinions about various subjects, and it attempts to utilize students opinions to interest or engage them in a major theme of the work. The activity is also

designed to help prepare students for problems they may encounter in their reading, and it helps prepare students for writing.

How Students View Homelessness

The first step in using the opinionnaire is to distribute it to the class, perhaps the day before it is going to begin the novel. After students have responded to all of the statements, I compile the results on the board. Then, beginning with the statements with which there was the most disagreement, I lead a class discussion that focuses on students' responses to each statement. I encourage students to explain the reasoning behind their responses and to debate differing opinions. For example, when a student agrees with statement 8, I encourage the student to explain why. The response is usually something like "That is what my dad says all the time." Often other students respond with "Anyone who believes that believes what they write in the National Inquirer." I encourage other students to explain and argue their responses, but I also provide synthesis and direction as the need arises. Since the statements on the opinionnaire require students to take a stand, a lively discussion invariably ensures.

One purpose of the opinionnaire and follow-up discussion is to create interest in the characters and issues in the literature they are about to read. Many of the statements on the opinionnaire are based on ideas expressed by various characters in the novel. Statement 9, for example, is almost exactly what Kelly's grandmother says about homeless people (124). It is perhaps the most common widespread myth about the homeless in America, and it explains one reason why many people are reluctant to do anything about the

problem. In the novel, it explains one of the main reasons why many of Kelly's family and friends do not want her to get involved with Mr. Weems.

Student responses to the statments on the opinionnaire that relate to this aspect of the issue usually indicate that many of them believe the same stereotype about homeless people that most Americans do. However, through the class discussion of the statements on the opinionnaire, students begin to question some of their initial responses and are motivated to find out how characters will deal with these issues in the novel.

The disagreement over the statements that is created in the classroom is an important factor in interesting or engaging students in the literature. At the end of the discussion, the teacher might use the disagreement with a statement like, "I see that we have considerable disagreement over statements 6 and 7." (Read statements). "Let's read the novel and find out which viewpoint is correct." Students are motivated to read because they want to find out if their view of the issue is correct.

More important, this activity provides a framework or context that will help students understand what the author wants reads to understand about homelessness and the other legacies of the Vietnam War. For example, just like most of the characters in the novel, our students fail to see what the war did to some of those who went to Vietnam, and they believe that problems like homelessness are somebody else's problem, not theirs. Many students assume as statement 1 states that there are plenty of private and government programs for homeless people. However, in discussing this statement, students begin to wonder what, if anything, is being done, and what should be done to help the homeless. This statement, and others on the opinionnaire, help students come to the literature with a framework or

context that will better enable them to understand the novel they are about to read.

After discussing most or all of the statements on the opinionnaire, students are ready to begin reading the novel. An interesting modification of the procedures I have described is to have students meet in small groups and have them try to reach a consensus on their answers before the whole class discussion.

A Conceptual Framework for Study of the Novel

One of the real values of the opinionnaire is that it provides an important framework for studying some key aspects of the novel. As students read the novel, you can have them fill out the opinionnaire according to how various characters would respond to the statements: Kelly, Mr. McAllister, Mrs. McAllister, Bob Weems, Aunt Eliza, Grandmother, Uncle Ralph, Cousin Allison, Julie, Courtney, Keith, Doug, Mr. Hardy, Mrs. Hunter, and Mrs. Martin. This will enable them to better understand the characters in the novel, and ultimately, enable them to interpret what the author wants readers to understand about homelessness and other legacies of the Vietnam War. After they complete the opinionnaire for a character, I lead a class discussion of their reponses. I also ask them to cite evidence from the novel to support their viewpoints.

Discussions of how various characters would respond to the statements are nearly as lively as those that deal with how students themselves repond to the statements. One reason for this is that students have thought about these issues prior to reading and have already gained confidence in discussing them in class. In addition, the statements on the

opinionnaire provide students with specific and concrete ways to talk about the actions and motives of characters.

One of the interesting things about these discussions is that many students cite similarities between the opinions of their parents and those of various characters in the novel. Without prompting on your part, you will likely find, as I did, that many students go beyond the test. They will apply what they are learning to their own lives.

Once students have finished the novel, I ask them to do two more things with the opinionnaire. First, I ask them to fill it out based on how they think the author would. Again, I lead a class discussion of their answers. This lively discussion will take students back to the text to find support for how they think the author would respond. Ultimately, discussing how the author would respond to the statements on the opinionnaire leads to a consideration of what the author is trying to say about the war and the aftermath of the war, and because of their previous work, this discussion will be at a high level.

Finally, I ask students to fill out the opinionnaire again for themselves and I have them compare their responses to how they responded before they read the novel. Very often opinions have changed. For example, in looking back at how they had marked the twelve statements on the opinionnaire prior to reading the novel, nearly every student usually changes their opinion on at least one statement as a result of their study. I lead a class discussion asking them to explain how and why their opinions have changed. This discussion is important because it helps students begin to see the impact that this literature has had on them.

The Writing Connection

If you will look at the next page of your handout, "*December Stillness* Writing Assiginments" (p. 72), I'll describe some of the assignments I have used with these pre-reading and reading activities, and how they also encourage effective writing.

Keep in mind what has taken place so far. Students have discussed the statements on the opinionnaire prior to reading. This discussion establishes the context, or helps to prepare students for interpreting the novel, and engages them in the characters and themes. Then, as students read the novel, they discussed how the characters would have responded to the statements on the opinionnaire. After they have finished the novel, students discussed how the author would have responded to the items on the opinionnaire. Finally, students discussed how their own responses have or have not changed as a result of having studied the novel.

The disagreement over what the author probably would have said about the statements provides a natural follow-up writing situation, assignment 1. (Read assignment.) Students are motivated in this writing situation because it is real. They are writing to a real audience--their peers! It follows directly out of what they have done in the discussions of the opinionnaire, so they have rehersed arguments, presented evidence and reasoning to support their interpretations, and heard refutations of their viewpoints. They are ready to write. And, they have a reason to write--to convince their peers to change their concusions. This is literary analysis as it should be.

Another possible follow-up writing activity is to have students write an interpretive essay about the novel. (Read assignment 2.) In this assignment, students are asked to interpret what the author is trying to say

about the war and the legacies of the war. Again, the opinionnaire discussion activities have helped students to make interpretations and how to turn their interpretations into written analytical essays. They gain confidence as a result of their participation in the sequence of discussion activities I have described.

The third assignment focuses on character analysis and asks students to explain how the main character changes as a result of her experiences. (Read assignment.) While the opinionnaire activities do help students with this assignment, I really think there are some other things you would probably need to do some additional things. If you ar interested, you might want to tak a look at my book, *Illumination Rounds: Teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War* (Urbana: NCTE, 1992), which contains a whole series of activities designed to prepare students for this assignment.

Assignment 4 follows directly from the class discussion of how students' opinions have or have not changed as a result of reading the novel. (Read assignment.) This assignment is both a personal response and involves some literary analysis. Students have success with this assignment because they have thought about and discussed their opinions before reading and after reading the novel, and they are able to explain how their opinions have changed as a result of reading it. Without the opinionnaire activity before reading the novel that requires them to articulate and defend their opinions, their written responses to this assignment would not be very good.

Assignment 5 is a creative assignment. (Read assignment.) Students usually have little difficultly with this assignment because in essence they have discussed this pretty thoroughly when they discussed how the characters would have responded to the statements on the opinionnaire, and

in their discussions of the opinionnaire after reading the novel. In other words, they usually have plenty of ideas for writing. In addition, some students are often quite anxious to show how they believe the characters would have acted based on their interpretations of the novel. You may need to spend a little time on writing dialogue to prepare them for this assignment.

The last assignment asks for a personal response to the novel. (Read assignment.) It follows directly from the discissions prior to, during, and after their reading. In these discussions students are rehersing what they are going to be asked to do in this writing assignment.

I am not trying to argue for one assignment over another. It really depends on your students and your situation, you might want to give just one of these assignments, or you might want to give them a choice between two or more assignments. What I want you to see is how the activities I have described helps to prepare students for reading and writing, engages them in reading and responding to the novel, helps them to interpret the novel, helps them to transform their interpretations into sophisticated written responses, and, perhaps most important of all, helps them to relate what they are reading to their own lives.

Conclusion

I have attempted to show you some literature that has come out of the war that you might want to try teaching in your own classes. Also, I have tried to show you some ways to teach this literature that encourages response. I have attempted to explain why I believe it is important that we teach the literature of the Vietnam War. I have only been able to show you

a few short examples of students' responses to some of the literature, discuss briefly some major types of literature that have come out of the war, suggest a couple of approaches to teaching this literature that foster response, and discuss a few of the ways that this literature speaks directly to students. However, after years of teaching the literature of the Vietnam War, it is my students who continually remind me of a simple truth about this literature, and indeed all literature, if it is worth studying--it is the characters, the human beings, that hold their interest, fascinate them, and evoke their empathy, and it is through the characters that they come to understand some truths about the Vietnam War. The reason for this is perhaps best stated by Mark Baker, who writes,

> War poses all the hard philosophical questions about life and death and morality and demands immediate answers. The abstractions of scholarly debate become the very concrete matters of survival. In one short year, Vietnam took the measure of a man and of the culture that put him there. War strips away the thin veneer applied slap-dash by the institutions of society and shows Man for exactly what he is. We must listen closely to the men and women who became both the victims and the perpetrators of the war, if we want to learn something real about this particular conflict, something real about the human spirit, something real about ourselves. (1981, xvi)

In other words, this literature speaks to students because the characters speak directly to them about the important issues that concern us all. This

literature fosters response because in it students find what seems to elude them so often with much of the literature we ask them to read: they find answers to their questions, and as a result, they are empowered to face the issues that affect their lives and their future.

Teaching the literature of the Vietnam War can enliven literature study in our classrooms because through it we can encourage response, show students the value of literature, all literature, and help them make the kinds of connections to literature, to the past, that will enrich their lives long after they leave our classrooms. In short, if we teach the literature of the Vietnam War in ways that are more than exercises in literary appreciation and analysis, then, to use Barry Kroll's words, it can "foster personal connection and critical reflection," or, to borrow a phrase from the war, it can "win students' hearts and minds."

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APPENDIX

Annotated Bibliography of Vietnam War Literature, classroom activities, and Writing Assignments

YA Literature and the Vietnam War: An Annotated Bibliography

The Vietnam Experience:

Alone in the Valley: Kenneth Waymon Baker. Permanent Press, 1992, 296 pp., $21.95. ISBN 1-877946-17-6. This novel tells the story of thoughtful, compassionate, eighteen-year-old Daniel Perdue, a common infantry soldier, who learns how to survive in Vietnam and tries to comprehend the war. Daniel experiences the horrors of war and is left scarred and saddened forever: his loss of innocence is the fondest of tragedies. The plot is absorbing and unfolds with gripping realism. Senior high up.

Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam. Ed. Bernard Edelman. Pocket, 1986, 316 pp., $6.95. ISBN 0-671-61750-8. This is a collection of letters home from those serving and working in Vietnam during the war in all areas from soldiers to donut dollies. The last chapter, "Last Letters," is powerful and heartbreaking. A 1989 ALA preferred choice by Young Adult readers. Senior high up.

Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam. Dir. Bill Couturie. Couturie Co. and Vietnam Veterans Ensemble Theater Company, 1988. (84 minutes, color.) HBO Home Video. A powerful documentary featuring pictures and film of the war with voice-overs by dozens of Hollywood stars reading the words of American GIs. The film follows a chronology that roughly corresponds to a soldier's year in Vietnam. The readings are from the collection of letters with the same title. Senior high up.

Everything We Had: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Thirty-three American Soldiers Who Fought it. Al Santoli. Ballantine, 1981, 268 pp., $5.95. ISBN 0-345-30336-9. This is an interesting and effective oral history of thirty-three veterns that takes the reader from 1962 through the fall of Saigon in 1975. The collection emphasizes their experiences in Vietnam. Senior high up.

Fallen Angels. Walter Dean Myers. Scholastic, 1988, 309 pp., $3.50. ISBN 0-590-40943-3. Selected as a 1990 *EJ* reviewers' choice (five reviewers) and a 1990 ALA preferred choice by Young Adult readers, this novel tells the story of Richie Perry, 17, who enlists to fight in Vietnam as a way out of a dead-end life in Harlem. He experiences all of the horrors of war as well as the racial conflict that existed among American troops. Richie questions his religious faith and his moral values. Junior high up.

If I Die in a Combat Zone. Tim O'Brien. Dell, 1987, 205 pp., $4.50. ISBN 0-440-34311-9. Besides being named ALA Best Book for Young Adults in 1973, this is considered by some as one of the most important works to come out of the war. It is the story of one soldier's journey from safe, middle-class America to the center of the horror of the Vietnam War. O'Brien emphasizes the fear and the moral dilemmas. Senior high up.

In the Combat Zone: An Oral History of American Women in Vietnam, 1966-1975. Kathryn Marshall. Viking, 1988, 280 pp., $7.95. ISBN 0-14-010829-7. The author interviewed twenty women who tell about their experiences in the war. They relate their many motives for going to Vietnam, their experiences, and the impact the war had on their lives. Marshall interviewed army nurses, Red Cross workers, and civilians. Senior high up.

Nam: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There. Mark Baker. Berkley, 1981, 301 pp., $4.50. ISBN 0-425-07168-5. One of the classics of Vietnam War literature. The author interviewed both men and women, officers, enlisted men of all kinds, prowar and antiwar veterans. He asked them, "What was Vietnam really like?" The result is a powerful, honest, and touchingly written book. The introduction is effective, and the interviews are organized around themes, which permits analysis and comparison with other war literature. Senior high up

365 Days. Ronald J. Glasser, M. D. Bantam, 1971, 245 pp., $4.50. ISBN 0-553-07372-1. An important book in Vietnam War literature. It is well-written and contains elements of memoir, oral history, and fiction. Glasser was an Army doctor who relates his experiences in Zama Hospital in Japan where he treated the wounded who were sent there from Vietnam. Senior high up

The War at Home

A Blue-Eyed Daisy. Cynthia Rylant. Dell, 1987, 181 pp., $2.95. ISBN 0-440-40927-6. Eleven-year-old Ellie Farley s uncle Joe goes off to war. She is confused about wars wars and men killing one another and even more confused by her family's and uncle's silence upon his return. Middle school/junior high.

Caribou. Meg Wolitzer. Bantam, 1986, 176 pp., $2.50. ISBN 0-553-25560-6. Becca Silverman, a twelve-year-old, is troubled by the Vietnam War. In fact, she is troubled by the idea of war in general. Her brother escapes to Canada to avoid the draft. She decides to paint a vivid antiwar picture as her entry in the school's art contest, whose theme is patriotism. Middle school/junior high.

Homecoming: When the Soldiers Returned from Vietnam. Bob Greene. Ballantine, 1990, 256 pp., $4.95. ISBN 0-345-36408-2. This is an interesting collection of letters by Vietnam veterans who wrote to author and syndicated columnist Bob Greene after he had asked his readers whether anyone had spat upon them when they came home from the war. It reports on the collision between the war in Asia and the war the vets faced at home. Senior high up.

Long Time Passing. Adrienne Jones. Harper and Row, 1990, 244 pp., $5.95. ISBN 0-06-023055-X. During the Vietnam War, young Jonas Duncan is being pulled in two directions. His father is a career Marine officer, and Jonas has been raised in the military life. Yet, with his mother dead, he s been sent to live with a cousin in northern California where has has discovered new friends and is drawn to a different lifestyle. He is attracted to the lovely Auleen and her commune friends, but his father wants him to join the military. Everyone is pulling him in different directions, and Jonas must decide what he wants to do. Senior high up

The Purple Heart. Marc Talbert. HarperCollins/Willa Perlman Books, 1992, 135 pp., $5.95. ISBN 0-06-020428-1. While Luke's father is in Vietnam, Luke and his best friend Mike watch the evening news for details about the war and play games in which fearless soldiers wage heroic battles. Luke's father brings a hero's medal home, but where is the fearless soldier in this tired, thin, haunted man? After Luke and Mike play a prank on old Mrs. Pederson, they learn how war really affects people and discover that being brave is sometimes terrifying. Junior high up.

Legacies I: The Refugee Experience

A Boat to Nowhere. Maureen Crane Wartski. NAL-Dutton, 1981, 160 pp., $2.95. ISBN 0-553-25560-6. Villagers protest Thay Van Chi s protection of a wandering orphan. They appear to be right when the boy seems to side with the Vietcong when they arrive. What the villagers do not realize is that the boy is acting so that he will have an opportunity to save them. The villagers become boat people and must endure terrible hardships and dangers. Junior high up.

Hello, My Name Is Scrambled Eggs. Jamie Gilson. Minstrel Books, 1988, 183 pp., $3.95. ISBN 0-671-74104-7. Tuan Nguyen is a Vietnamese refugee who arrives in America to live with the Trumble family in a small town in Illinois. Their son, Harvey, is a seventh grader who tries to mold Tuan into an "American kid." Middle school/junior high.

The Voyage of Lucky Dragon. Jack Bennett. Prentice-Hall, 1985, 156 pp., $5.95. ISBN 0-139-44158-1. After the fall of Saigon, a Vietnamese family flees the Communist reeducation camps in a fishing boat bound for Australia. This novel examines the plight of the boat people. Senior high.

Legacies II: The Next Generation

Charlie Pippin. Candy Dawson Boyd. Puffin Books, 1987, 192 pp., $3.95. ISBN 0-14-032587-5. The father of eleven-year-old Charlie returns home from Vietnam a bitter, rigid man. Charlie tries to understand her father by studying about the Vietnam War. She discovers that her father is a decorated war hero. The novel examines how too many blacks had to fight the war. Middle school/ junior high.

December Stillness. Mary Downing Hahn. Avon,1990,192 pp., $2.95. ISBN 0-380-70764-0. This 1990 ALA preferred choice by Young Adult readers focuses on thirteen-year-old Kelly McAlister. Kelly gains an enriched view of life beyond the routine of school when she attempts to befriend Mr. Weems, a disturbed, homeless Vietnam veteran. In the process of helping him, Kelly grows emotionally and acquires social awareness and responsibility. Middle school up.

In Country. Bobbie Ann Mason. Harper-Collins,1989, 368 pp., $5.95. ISBN 0-06-080959-0. Besides being chosen as a 1990 *EJ* reviewers' choice (three reviewers), this effective novel tells the story of Samantha Hughes, a recent high school graduate who wants answers about the Vietnam War. Her father was killed in the war. Her mother can't really tell her anything about her father since they were married only a month before his death. Her uncle, Emmett, with whom she lives, could be suffering ill effects from exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam. She is attracted to another Vietnam veteran who is emotionally scarred by the war. Senior high up.

Park's Quest. Katherine Paterson. Puffin Books,1989, 180 pp., $3.95. ISBN 0-14-034262-1. The author describes the effects of the war on the children of those who served. The main character, Park, comes to his grandfather's farm in Virginia to learn more about his father, who died in Vietnam, and his father's family. He meets a Vietnamese-American girl named Thanh, who may be his half-sister. Junior high up.

Pocket Change. Kathryn Jensen. Scholastic, 1990, 169 pp., $2.95. ISBN 0-590-43419-5. This 1991 ALA preferred choice by Young Adult readers focuses on some of the effects of the war on the families and children of those who served in Vietnam. Josie's life falls apart when her father's increasingly erratic and violent behavior threatens their family. Determined to help him, she pieces together clues from his past and becomes convinced that his experiences in the Vietnam War are continuing to haunt him. Junior high up.

Travelers. Larry Bograd. Lippincott, 1986, 192 pp., $11.90. ISBN 0-397-32128-7. A boy is haunted by the image of the father he never knew, who died in Vietnam. He tries to find out more about him. He questions the adults around him, but they avoid his questions. As the boy uncovers the truth, he discovers the unhealed wounds that the war has left all around him. Junior high up.

What Should We Tell Our Children about Vietnam? Bill McCloud. Berkley, 1989, 155 pp., $4.50. ISBN 0-425-13361-3. The author, a Vietnam veteran and junior high school social studies teacher, wondered what to tell his students about Vietnam. He wrote to the people who directed, fought, protested, and reported the war. These 128 letters form a remarkable cross-section of public opinion from statesmen, veterans, protestors, writers, and others. Some of the contributing writers and filmmakers include Allen Ginsberg, Larry Heinemann, John Hersey, Ken Kesey, Tim O'Brien, Oliver Stone, Kurt Vonnegut, and many others. Middle school up.

Some Important and Teachable Vietnam War Literature

American Daughter Gone to War: On the Front Lines with an Army Nurse in Vietnam. Winnie Smith, LC, 1994, 352 pp., $12.00. ISBN 0-671-87048-3. Winnie was an idealistic twenty-one-year-old in the Army Nurse Corps when the war officially began in 1965. Filled with romantic notions about being a combat nurse, she requested assignment to an intensive care unit in Saigon, where casualties were brought by helicopter just minutes from the battlefield. This is Winnie's powerful, poignant story of a woman's struggle to survive the bloodbath she confronted on the ward, and the trauma that filled her life afterward.

Born on the Fourth of July. Ron Kovic. Pocket, 1976, 224 pp., $4.50. ISBN 0-671-52792-4. An important book in Vietnam War literature. Kovic describes his idealistic enlistment in the Marines, his service in Vietnam, his painful return home in a wheelchair, and his treatment at the hands of the Veterans Administration. He also tells of his involvement in the antiwar movement.

Close Quarters. Larry Heinemann. Penguin. 1974. 336 pp., $8.95. ISBN 0-140-08678-5. This classic novel of the war follows the coming of age of Philip Dosier and his fellow soldiers in Vietnam, where they learn that war is nothing like a John Wayne movie. Dosier returns home stunned by his experiences and deadened to emotions.

Dispatches. Michael Herr. Vintage, 1977, 294 pp., $10.00. ISBN 0-679-73525-9. One of the best works on the war. It describes what it was like to fight in the Vietnam War. No book does a better job of capturing the *feel* of Vietnam. Herr first went to Vietnam in 1967 as a correspondent for *Esquire* magazine. This new journalism style work is graphic, surrealistic, compelling, and terrifying.

Fields of Fire. James Webb. Bantam, 1978, 415 pp., $5.95. ISBN 0-553-25679-3. In this major novel of the Vietnam War, a Marine unit fights the Vietcong, endures unbelievable living conditions, confronts the dangers of the "bush," and faces death and injury. Webb explores the reasons each man became a Marine, as the reader follows him through combat. The novel also examines the difficulties veterans faced when they returned home.

Going after Cacciato. Tim O'Brien. Dell, 1978, 395 pp., $4.50. ISBN 0-440-12966-4. This 1979 National Book Award winner is an account of a soldier's flight from battle that alternates between fantasy and reality. Paul Berlin, shocked by the horror and hopelessness of the war, walks away from his unit in the jungle, hoping to make his way to Paris. He is pursued by a group of soldiers.

A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain: Stories. Robert Olen Butler. Penguin Books, 1992, 249 pp., $10.00. ISBN 0-14-017664-0. The unspoken legacy of the Vietnam War--the ordeals of the Vietnamese--is powerfully evoked in these fifteen stories, each narrated in a different voice. Old or young, humble or arrogant, puzzled or proud, these are characters for whom the absurdities of contemporary American popular culture and searing memories of war coexist. These people struggle to find a balance between tradition and assimilation, between their hearts and their hopes.

Home Before Morning: The Story of an Army Nurse in Vietnam. Lynda Van Devanter. Warner, 1983, 382 pp., $4.95. ISBN 0-446-30962-1. The author tells of her experiences during her tour of duty; how she lost her idealism; the problems she had when she returned home, including being treated as "a murderer rather than a healer"; and her experiences with posttraumatic stress disorder. This is a powerful narrative.

A Rumor of War. Philip Caputo. Ballantine, 1977, 328 pp., $4.95. ISBN 0-345-29070-4. One of the major works of the war. Caputo was a young Marine infantry officer for sixteen months in Vietnam, beginning in 1965. He presents a grim, honest picture of the war. He recounts that the soldier's enemies were boredom and climate as much as the Viet Cong.

Sympathy for the Devil. Kent Anderson. Warner, 1987, 350 pp., $5.50. ISBN 0-446-35222-5. This is an effective novel in which the main character, Hanson, comes to Vietnam as a naive, liberal, college-educated young man. After a series of atrocities and deaths, the horror of battle, and the despair of the war, Hanson becomes a hardened soldier.

The Things They Carried. Tim O'Brien. Penguin, 1990, 273 pp., $8.95. ISBN 0-14-014773-5. An unusual and powerful novel in which war stories are told by various characters and narrators who sometimes retell in different ways stories already told. Narrators dispute the accuracy of what they themselves are saying. Occasionally a narrator will come to the end of a harrowing tale and then insist that the protagonist did not do the terrible or heroic things he has just recited, but that he himself did them.

The Vietnam Experience in Combat Narratives of the Vietnam War

1. **The mystique of pre-induction**:
   - What are the main character's attitudes toward war? Patriotism? Technology?
   - What is his or her attitude toward war and/or the war in Vietnam?
   - What are major influences on the main character's attitudes?
   - Why does he or she decide to go to war?
2. **The initiation into military culture in recruit training**:
   - What difficulties does the main character have adjusting to life in the military?
   - What are significant experiences in recruit training? Why?
   - How does the main character change as a result of recruit training?
   - How does recruit training attempt to prepare young people for the war in Vietnam? Is it effective? Why or why not?
3. **The dislocation of arrival in Vietnam--culture shock**:
   - How does the main character travel to Vietnam?
   - What are his or her initial experiences upon arrival in country?
   - How does he or she react to these experiences?
   - How are the Vietnamese portrayed?
4. **The confrontation with mortality in the first firefight**:
   - How does the main character react the first time in combat?
   - What impact does this experience have on the main character?
   - What are the concerns of the main character and others around him or her?
5. **Experience and Consideration**:
   - How and why do the concerns of the characters change over time?
   - What is the main character's attitude toward the war, the military, America, and the Vietnamese? How and why has his or her attitude changed?
   - What experiences have had an impact on the main characters? Why?
   - What difficult moral choices does the main character consider? How does s/he respond? Why?
6. **The phenomenon of coming home**:
   - How does the main character leave Vietnam?
   - What is his or her reaction to leaving?
   - What is the main character's return to the United States like?
   - How has the main character changed?
   - What is his or her attitude toward the war?
   - How do people at home treat the main character?
7. **Putting It Together: Central Meaning**:
   - What is the author telling readers about the Vietnam War?
   - What is the author saying about war?
   - What is the author saying about courage? Friendship? War as a ritual?

Depending on the work, some or all of the following questions may also be important:

8. **Structure**:
   - How is the novel structured?
   - How does the structure contribute to the meaning?
   - How is the structure similar to and/or different from combat narratives of other wars?
9. **Style and literary technique**:
   - What is the point of view of the novel? Who is telling the story?
   - Does the point of view change? If so, how?
   - How does the point of view contribute to the meaning?
   - What are major literary techniques the author uses?
   - How do these techniques contribute to the meaning?

Adapted from Johannessen, Larry R. (1992). *Illumination Rounds: Teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War*. Urbana: NCTE, pp. 83-85; and from Johannessen, Larry R. (in press). "Fostering Critical Thinking and Response with Combat Narratives of the Vietnam War." In Marc Jason Gilbert (ed.), *The Vietnam War: Critical Thinking Approaches*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.

The Soldier's Dilemma

During the Vietnam War, an infantry squad was patrolling deep in enemy-controlled territory near the Cambodian border. At one point in this operation, the squad leader, Sergeant Johnson, decided to scout along a trail that ran through a valley, leading toward a village a short distance away. Johnson told one of his rifleman, a private named Dillon, to stay on a small hilltop as a lookout, while the rest of the squad followed along the trail in the valley below. Johnson expressed concern about a possible ambush on the trail and reminded Dillon that their platoon had been ambushed in this same area and suffered a number of casualties some weeks prior to the present operation. "Don't take any chances," Johnson warned. "Better to kill a few of those murdering villagers, than to let any more Americans die."

As Dillon watched the squad make its way along the trail, he saw a Vietnamese woman suddenly appear on the trail just ahead of the squad, but around a bend so that they could not see her. From his vantage point, the woman appeared to lean over the edge of the trail and then quickly move back into the underbrush--out of sight of the squad, but still visible to Dillon.

Dillon was immediately suspicious. This was enemy-controlled territory, and the woman could easily be part of the local guerrilla forces. On the other hand, many innocent peasants lived in and around the villages. Was the woman a guerrilla soldier who might set off a mine or booby trap when the squad came around the bend in the trail? Or was the woman simply a peasant who had perhaps dropped something on the trail in her haste to hide from the advancing American soldiers? Also, what about the things Johnson had told him? As a soldier he was taught to obey all orders of his superiors. To disobey is a crime.

As these thoughts went through Dillon's mind, the squad kept moving and now was almost at the spot where the woman was hiding. The squad was too far away for Dillon to call out to them. Even a warning shot would probably not stop them from proceeding around the bend. Dillon raised his rifle and lined up his sights on the woman in the brush. But as his finger tightened on the trigger, he hesitated.

If he shot the woman and there turned out not to be a mine or booby trap on the trail, he would have murdered an innocent person. But if he didn't shoot her, a number of his friends might be blown to bits if the woman detonated a mine.

Questions

What should Dillon do: hold his fire or shoot the woman? Why is that the right thing for him to do? Do you agree with what Sergeant Johnson told Dillon? Why or why not?

Adapted from Kroll, Barry M. (1992). *Teaching Hearts and Minds: College Students Reflect on the Vietnam War in Literature.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, pp. 173-174.

YA Combat Narratives of the Vietnam War: Writing Assignments

1. **Writing about the narrative:** Write an essay in which you interpret what the author is saying about the Vietnam War. Make sure that you use evidence from the work to support your interpretation of what the author wants readers to understand about the Vietnam War. Also, make sure that you explain how your evidence supports your interpretation of the work.

2. **Writing about the narrative:** Write an essay in which you explain how the author (or main character) would answer the questions posed in "The Soldier's Dilemma." Make sure that you answer all the questions in the case. Also, make sure that you present evidence from the work and explain how your evidence supports your view of what the author (or main character) would say about "The Soldier's Dilemma."

3. **Writing about the main character:** Write an essay in which you explain how the main character changes as a result of his or her experiences. What was the character like before entering the military and going to war? What were his or her values? What was the character like at the end of the novel? How has the character changed? What are his or her values? Has the character grown or matured? What experiences caused these changes? If you do not believe the character changes, how do you account for the way he or she is at the end of the work? Make sure that you use evidence from the work to support your analysis of the character and explain how your evidence supports your analysis.

4. **Writing about/in response to the narrative:** Write a composition in which you explain what you learned about the Vietnam War as a result of your study of the work. Make sure you explain what your opinions and views regarding the Vietnam War were before reading the work, what your opinions and views are now after reading it, and provide specific evidence from the novel to explain how and why your opinions and views have changed.

5. **Writing about/in response to the narrative:** Write a composition in which you explain how and why your views have changed about how you would answer the questions posed in "The Soldier's Dilemma" as a result of reading the narrative. Make sure that you explain how you answered the questions prior to reading the narrative and why, and how you would answer the questions now after reading the narrative. Provide specific evidence from the narrative to explain how and why your views have changed.

6. **Writing in response to the narrative:** The Vietnam War has been called "the war that won't go away": a number of issues such as the POW/MIA's continue to divide the nation; the legacies of the war have a strong impact on the nation's foreign policy decisions; and now the legacies of the war are affecting and will probably continue to affect the children of the Vietnam generation. Write an essay in which you explain why you believe the Vietnam War will not go away. How are the themes, issues, and controversies that are raised in the narrative you read (or that you know about from other sources) still with us today? In your opinion, what can be done to help the nation heal the wounds of the war?

Discussion Questions for "Preface" and "Gathering Clouds": Al Santoli's *Everything We Had*

1. According to the author, what have the veterans who speak in the book attempted to do? What have they reflected on? Why are they now speaking about their experiences? Why might they have been reluctant to speak about their experiences?

2. What is it that these veterans are seeking? Why? Why do these veterans believe that they are now "wiser people"?

3. Why is this book called an oral history? What does this one do? Why does the author feel that it is necessary to say that the veterans do not hold a particular "set of political beliefs" and that they are wary of the idea of war as a "rite of passage"?

4. What do the speakers want readers to understand about Vietnam? Why? How does what this book attempts to do differ from traditional history? The author of this work is also a Vietnam veteran, how might this be an advantage for him? Why might this be a problem?

5. Why do you think the author titles this chapter "Gathering Clouds"? Is this title effective? Why or why not?

6. What is the point of the first selection? Why does the author put it first even though it took place in time after the other two selections in the chapter? What was Ross's job?

7. What was Barry's arrival in Saigon and Nha Trang like? What was most surprising to him? Why? When was he in Vietnam? According to Barry, why is it a "nine-to-five" war? What are the main points of this story?

8. What are the main points of Phaler's story? What is he trying to say about LBJ? What was his rank and where was he stationed?

9. Considering the three stories in this chapter, what generalizations can you make about the Vietnam War? In other words, what things do they have in common?

10. Which of the stories in this chapter had the most impact on you? Why?

Based on an idea from Johannessen, Larry R. (1992). *Illumination Rounds: Teaching the Literature of the Vietnam War*. Urbana: NCTE, pp. 69-71.

Small Group Assignment: *Everything We Had*

Directions: As a member of the small group to which you have been assigned, prepare a twenty to twenty-five minute oral presentation that answers the following questions about the chapter your small group has been assigned. The group may organize answers in any manner desired; however, the questions below should be answered in some fashion. The only other requirement is that all members of the group must participate in the oral presentation. Being absent does not excuse you from your responsibilities. If you fail to show up, the group will have to do it without you. The chapter assignments are as follows: group #1: "Sand Castles," Nelson-Ross, pp. 19-51; Group #2: "Sand Castles," Phaler-D. Smith, pp. 52-79; Group #3: "Peaks and Valleys," Mock-Santos, pp. 83-132; Group #4: "Peaks and Valleys," Delate-Van Devanter, pp. 133-164; Group #5: "Barren Harvest," pp. 167-221; Group #6, "Operation New Wind," pp. 225-260.

1. What main points (at least two) does the author make about the war in this chapter?

2. What evidence from the speakers in this chapter support your conclusions from #1, and how does the evidence support them?

3. What else in this chapter did you find interesting or important? Why?

4. How does the title to the chapter and some of the selections prepare readers for the stories that follow?

5. How would you characterize the experiences described by the speakers? What impact did the experiences described have on the speakers?

6. What time period of the war (from and to) does this chapter cover? What key historical events are mentioned in the stories?

7. How would you characterize the war during this time period? What evidence from the speakers support your conclusions, and how does the evidence support them?

8. How does what you learn in this chapter relate to the book as a whole?

9. Which stories in this chapter (no more than three) had the most impact on you? Why? **OR,** What did you learn about the Vietnam War from this chapter that you did not know before reading it?

10. How does what you learn in this chapter contribute to the historical record of the war? Why? **OR,** How effective is this chapter as a part of a work of literature? Why?

Everything We Had: Writing Assignments

1. **Writing about *Everything*:** In the preface, Santoli argues that "anyone who wants to test his or her or the nation's mettle in a presumed rite of passage--war--should show care and wisdom" because "the Vietnam War was a human ordeal and not an abstract heroic adventure as might be understood by Hollywood or a politician's speechwriter." Write an essay in which you demonstrate how Santoli proves his claim. Make sure that you include evidence from the stories in the book to support your points.

2. **Writing about *Everything* as literature and/or history:** You are a member of your school's book selection committee. The committee consists of a member of the school board, a school administrator, a teacher, a parent from the community, and a student. The committee has been asked to decide if Al Santoli's *Everything* should be added to the curriculum. Each member of the committee has been asked to read the book and write a recommendation that will be read by the committee. Write your recommendation to the committee. In writing your recommendation, consider some or all of the following questions: What value might studying this work have? Is this work good literature and/or history? Is it effective? Why or why not? What might students learn from studying this work? How important is what students might learn? Use specific examples from the text to support your viewpoint.

3. **Writing about the Vietnam experience:** One of the things Santoli tries to accomplish in his oral history is to portray what it was like to fight in the Vietnam War. Describe one or two aspects of the Vietnam experience, or "the raw experience of what happened" to the men and women who fought in Vietnam. What was this experience like? What are key features of the experience? Make sure that you include evidence from the book to support your conclusions or generalizations about the aspect(s) of the Vietnam experience that you are discussing.

4. **Writing from *Everything*:** Interview a Vietnam veteran about his or her experiences in the war. Use the information in *Everything We Had* as the basis for your interview. Then, write a composition in which you compare the responses you obtained from the Vietnam veteran to the stories contained in the book. How do your interviewee's experiences compare to those in the book? In what ways are this veteran's experiences typical of those in Santoli's book? What is unique about this veteran's experiences?

5. **Writing in response to *Everything*:** Write about a time that you or someone you know had a traumatic experience that forced you to confront your own mortality. What was the experience? What thoughts and feelings did you have during and after the experience? In *Everything We Had*, Santoli says that the veterans in his book try to reflect back and talk about having once been "idealistic young people" who "were confronted by the awesomeness of fighting other human beings." In the experience you are writing about, what was it about the experience that made you or this person feel that you were confronting the most important experience of your life? How did you change as a result of the experience?

Legacies of The Vietnam War: Vietnamese Refugees

Directions: Read each of the following statements. Write *A* if you agree with the statement and *D* if you disagree with it. Be prepared to explain your answers.

Agree or Disagree

_____ 1. Even today, more than twenty years after the end of the Vietnam War, there are still hundreds of refugees leaving Vietnam.

_____ 2. Slang phrases like "hit the books" and "stick with me" are very difficult for people from other countries to understand.

_____ 3. "Boat people" refers to Vietnamese refugees who were engaged in fishing for a living when they lived in Vietnam.

_____ 4. The Vietnam War ended more than twenty years ago; therefore, it is ridiculous to think that refugees are still leaving Vietnam and trying to enter the United States and other western nations.

_____ 5. It is a good idea for new immigrants with strange sounding names to take American names because it will make it easier for them to fit in.

_____ 6. It can be very hard for young people from other countries to adjust to life in America because often their parents want them to follow the old ways, but the kids want to be as "American" as possible.

_____ 7. It is a good idea to shout when speaking to foreigners who do not understand English very well; this helps them to understand what you are trying to say.

_____ 8. There are still thousands of Vietnamese refugees in camps in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia who would like to immigrate to the United States or other western nations.

_____ 9. Many Vietnamese refugees suffered numerous hardships and faced many dangers when they escaped from their homeland.

_____ 10. It is disgusting to think that the Vietnamese people eat dogs in the same way that many Americans eat cows and pigs.

_____ 11. Many foreigners from underdeveloped countries may be terrified by modern conveniences such as escalators and hair dryers that most Americans take for granted.

_____ 12. To be successful in America, immigrants should learn the language, values, and culture of their adopted country, and try to forget the language, values, and culture of their homelands.

_____ 13. America is a nation of immigrants; therefore, it is important for everyone to learn as much as possible about the culture and values of new immigrants.

_____ 14. To truly understand someone from another country, you must understand something about their culture.

_____ 15. The best well to help a new immigrant fit in is to try to "Americanize" him or her as quickly as possible.

_____ 16. Thousands of Amerasian refugees--the offspring of American servicemen--and their family members have come to the United States for resettlement.

Hello, My Name Is Scrambled Eggs Writing Assignments

1. **Writing about the novel**: Write a letter to someone in the class who disagrees with you about Jamie Gilson's stand on two of the statements on the opinionnaire. Try to convince this person that he or she is wrong and that your interpretation is correct. Make sure that you use evidence from *Hello, My Name Is Scrambled Eggs* to support your viewpoint that Jamie Gilson would agree or disagree with a particular statement on the opinionnaire.

2. **Writing about the novel**: The novel deals with important issues regarding war and the aftermath or legacies of the Vietnam War. Write an essay in which you interpret what is the author saying about war and the aftermath of the Vietnam War. What are the effects of war on Vietnamese refugees, their families, and, in particular, on refugee children? What are the effects of the war on those who served in Vietnam and on American society? What can someone do about the wounds of this war? In presenting your viewpoint, provide specific supporting evidence from the book and careful reasoning.

3. **Writing about the main character**: Write an essay in which you explain how Harvey Trumble changes as a result of his experiences. What was he like before he meets Tuan and his family? What were his values then? When he is told that he is going to befriend Tuan, what is his attitude toward Vietnamese refugees and Tuan? What is Harvey like at the end of the novel? How has he changed? What are his values? What is his attitude toward Tuan and his family? Has he grown or matured? How? What caused these changes? Make sure that you use evidence from the novel to support your analysis of the character and explain how your evidence supports your analysis.

4. **Writing about/in response to the novel**: Write a composition in which you explain how your opinion has changed and why you have changed your opinion about two of the statements on the opinionnaire after reading *Hello, My Name Is Scrambled Eggs*. Make sure that you explain what your opinion was before reading the novel and why, what your opinion is now after reading it, and provide specific evidence from the novel to explain how and why your opinion has changed.

5. **Writing about the novel**: Create new, appropriate and catchy chapter titles for at least two different chapters in the novel, and write a composition explaining why your new titles are good ones. Each of the chapters in the novel has a title. Choose at least two of the chapters and think of different titles which would be appropriate and catchy. Then, using evidence from the novel and your own reasoning, explain why each new title is a good one. What makes your title appropriate in terms of what happens in the chapter? What makes your title appropriate in terms of the content or themes in the chapter? What makes it catchy? Why will readers want to read the chapter after reading your title?

6. **Writing in response to the novel**: Holidays celebrated in one country may be completely different from those celebrated in another. In the novel, Tuan and his family did not understand Halloween or birthday parties. Choose an American holiday and look up the history of that holiday, such as Thanksgiving, The Fourth of July, or Halloween. Then, write a composition in which you explain the history of the holiday and how you would explain or describe what people do on the holiday or how people celebrate the holiday to someone from another country. What did you learn about the holiday that helps explain what it means? How would you explain this holiday to someone from another country who has no conception of it?

Homelessness in America

Directions: Read each of the following statements. Write *A* if you agree with the statement or *D* if you disagree with it.

Agree or
Disagree

_____ 1. With all of the help available from government and private programs, there is no reason for anyone to be homeless in America.

_____ 2. Homeless people wouldn't be homeless if they would clean themselves up, get a haircut, and find a job.

_____ 3. The Vietnam War has little, if anything, to do with the homeless problem in America.

_____ 4. Homeless people are not much different from you and me. They have just run into some bad luck.

_____ 5. Homeless people should not be permitted in public buildings, such as libraries or museums.

_____ 6. Many homeless people have severe psychological problems and are dangerous.

_____ 7. Many homeless people do have emotional or psychological problems, and what they need most is professional help.

_____ 8. Many homeless people live better than the average American because they receive free handouts and shelter and have no responsibilities.

_____ 9. Most homeless people are drunks or drug addicts.

_____ 10. To be safe, the average person should avoid contact with homeless people.

_____ 11. Homeless Vietnam veterans who blame the war for their problems are just bums using Vietnam as an excuse.

_____ 12. Homeless people are vagrants and should be arrested and put in jail.

December Stillness Writing Assignments

1. **Writing about the novel**: Write a letter to someone in the class who disagrees with you about Downing Hahn's stand on two of the statements on the opinionnaire. Try to convince this person that he or she is wrong and that your interpretation is correct. Make sure that you use evidence from *December Stillness* to support your viewpoint that Downing Hahn would agree or disagree with a particular statement on the opinionnaire.

2. **Writing about the novel**: The novel deals with important issues regarding war and the aftermath or legacies of the Vietnam War. Write an essay in which you interpret what is the author saying about war and the aftermath of the Vietnam War. What are the effects of war on veterans, on their families, and on their children? What are the effects of the war on society? What can someone do about the wounds of this war? In presenting your viewpoint, provide specific supporting evidence from the book and careful reasoning.

3. **Writing about the main character**: Write an essay in which you explain how Kelly McAllister changes as a result of her experiences. What was she like before she attempts to befriend Mr. Weems? What were her values then? What is her attitude toward the war and the homeless? What did she think of her father and mother and other people in her life? What is Kelly like at the end of the novel? How has she changed? What are her values? Has she grown or matured? How? What caused these changes? Make sure that you use evidence from the novel to support your analysis of the character and explain how your evidence supports your analysis.

4. **Writing about/in response to the novel**: Write a composition in which you explain how your opinion has changed and why you have changed your opinion about two of the statements on the opinionnaire after reading *December Stillness*. Make sure that you explain what your opinion was before reading the novel and why, what your opinion is now after reading it, and provide specific evidence from the novel to explain how and why your opinion has changed.

5. **Writing from the novel**: Write a new scene for the novel. Imagine that Kelly gets one more chance to try to reach Mr. Weems. Perhaps Kelly confronts him in the little strip of woods where he sleeps on Steadman Farm Way, or she might meet him again at Lake Columbus? What does Kelly say to him this time that she hasn't already said? How does she try to reach him? Describe how Mr. Weems reacts to Kelly? What does he say? What does he do? What is the outcome of the encounter? Make sure that your scene is consistent with how the characters are portrayed in the novel and that you have some dialogue between characters.

6. **Writing in response to the novel**: The author argues that the legacies of the Vietnam War, such as the homeless problem, continue to have an impact on the nation. In fact, the author suggests that the legacies of the war are affecting and will probably continue to affect the children of the Vietnam generation. Write a composition in which you explain why you believe the Vietnam War continues to haunt the nation. How are the themes, issues, and controversies that are raised in the novel (or what you know about from other sources) still with us today? In the novel, Kelly at least tries to help Mr. Weems, and she tries to tell others about the plight of veterans like Mr. Weems. In your opinion, what can be done to help the nation heal the wounds of the war? Are the actions Kelly took enough? Do more people need to do things like what Kelly does? What else can be done?